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RURAL YOUTH DELINQUENCY--SOME QUESTIONS AS WE LOOK AHEAD.

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PROGRESSIVE URBANIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION HAVE RESULTED IN HIGHER JUVENILE DELINQUENCY RATES, AND WHILE THE MIGRATION FROM RURAL TO URBAN AREAS SEEMS TO BE STABILIZING, DELINQUENCY HAS BEEN AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE MORE OF A PROBLEM IN URBAN THAN RURAL AREAS. IN MANY CASES RURAL AREAS ARE CONFRONTED WITH A LACK OF PROPER DETENTION FACILITIES AND PRACTICE UNSOUND PROBATION SERVICES LEADING TO EXCESSIVE OR UNNECESSARY COMMITMENTS TO JUVENILE INSTITUTIONS. TO ALLEVIATE DELINQUENCY ON A SOUND SYSTEMATIC BASIS, THE SCHOOLS SHOULD BE THE MAIN AXIS AROUND WHICH A COMMUNITY PROGRAM WOULD REVOLVE. THROUGH SUCH A COMMUNITY DELINQUENCY PROGRAM, RURAL YOUTH WOULD BE AFFORDED EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO BENEFIT FROM PROFESSIONAL SERVICES WHICH ARE NOT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO MANY OF THEM. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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Rural Youth Delinquency - Some Questions As We Look Ahead

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It is clear from research findings that progressive urbanization and industrialization result in higher juvenile delinquency rates. Obviously, traditional social controls over individual behavior are less effective in and around the big city than in truly rural areas. City life seems to undermine the efficacy of social controls by the family (including relatives) and a fairly homogeneous group of neighbors which can be more effective controls in the distinctly rural community. Institutional controls, such as those exercised by the church, also seem to be less effective in the city. Thus, the rural setting itself is an important favorable factor in considering the problem of juvenile delinquency among rural youth.

Essentially, rural areas are those where people are living outside of the 219 standard metropolitan areas where two-thirds of our population now lives. These metropolitan areas have grown more than 60 percent faster than the rest of the country since 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau Population Report). However, the trend towards greater rural-metropolitan imbalance shows signs of abating. From 1960-65 there was a marked slowing down from the 1950-60 period when the metropolitan population grew nearly five times the rate for nonmetropolitan areas. Nevertheless, by 1980, 75 percent of our population will live in metropolitan areas. (As noted by John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, in hearings on the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act of 1967, before the General Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives.) Certainly, this has implications for future planning to prevent and control juvenile delinquency.

While delinquency will continue to be more of an urban than a rural problem because of the higher volume and rates in urban areas, it will not disappear from the rural countryside. We know that rural areas have fewer resources for delinquency prevention, control, and treatment than metropolitan areas. Therefore, as we look ahead and see the scarcity of resources in rural areas to deal with delinquency the question must be asked, "Is it feasible to expand these resources? And if so, where should we begin? What should be the main thrust--towards the home, school, or the community?"

Looking ahead, I have a strong conviction that if we are to improve delinquency prevention productivity, this must occur primarily in the schools at the primary grade level. For systematic sustained application of prevention services and programs on a substantial scale, it seems to me,

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the schools should be the main axis around which a community delinquency prevention program revolves. School is where the children are, and where we can get at them most efficiently. It is often the only place where arrangements can be made to work out the serious problems which some children have. This is especially so in rural areas where pertinent community services are scarce. It is widely recognized that children bring their problems to school with them. Virtually, every youngster admits the importance of school to his future, and very few adrift in the streets really want to be out of school. However, too many children find the classroom a boring, dull, and frustrating experience.

Last year, Secretary Gardner asked the Russell Sage Foundation to prepare a summary of delinquency prevention and control experience to help his Department with its planning. A number of outstanding practitioners and researchers in the field were asked for their thinking on future program directions. The resulting booklet had this to say about the schools:

"Even though the behavior problems that appear in school usually reflect inadequacies in family and community background, and therefore may not be in a clear sense created by the school itself, the school may still be the most efficient organization through which to work. Through the school system, it may be possible to bring about changes in life conditions and opportunities of large numbers of youth more effectively than through individual families."*

The key question in this regard as we look ahead is" Will schools become involved in delinquency prevention? Will schools be willing and able to develop their potentials for delinquency prevention in rural areas?

Deficiency of Detention Facilities and Probation Services in Rural Areas

Two of the most glaring deficiencies of pertinent resources for rural youth already delinquent are proper detention facilities and sound probation services.

Between one-third and one-half of all counties in the country are without probation services and this leads to excessive or unnecessary commitments to juvenile institutions because the juvenile judge lacks alternatives to commitment.

In 1955, one State reported that in large urban areas 5.6 percent of children referred to court were committed to public training schools while in rural areas, 15.9 percent of children referred to court were committed. Offense or diagnostic differentials might account for some of this urban-rural disproportion in commitments, but the stronger tendency of judges in rural areas to commit to State juvenile institutions is fairly clear.

*Wheeler and Cottrell: Juvenile Delinquency: Its Prevention and Control. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1966, p. 17.

The pattern of these differentials has practical implications for treatment. While it may not be true that all rural boys are novices, and that all urban boys are well-versed in delinquency, the differences found between the two groups indicate that diversification of incarceration and treatment is called for. When a naive country boy is incarcerated with what are likely to be more sophisticated city bred delinquents the experience is not likely to be a constructive one in his personal development.

Conclusion

I have not touched upon certain facets of the rural delinquency problem such as probable differing standards of law enforcement between rural and urban areas and uneven or under-reporting of court cases (particularly informal) which seems characteristic of rural courts.

Our knowledge of the genesis, nature, and extent of delinquency in rural areas has wide gaps because pertinent research is scarce and juvenile court statistics incomplete. We know, however, that the basic needs of boys and girls are essentially the same whether they live in the country, suburb, or city. We know that poverty, neglect, and lack ofopportunity for wholesome activities take their toll in maladjusted personalities and juvenile delinquency in rural districts as well as in urban.

All youth need a sense of belonging and usefulness wherever they live. The degree of concern for the well-being of its young people, which each rural community demonstrates so that youth have this sense, seems to be a key factor in delinquency prevention; in keeping individual boys and girls from lapsing into delinquency.

The unavailability of court related services in many counties throughout the country for children in trouble leads to harmful detention in jails and commitment to institutions of many children who should remain in the community.

Some progress in giving the rural delinquent equal opportunities to benefit from sound professional services seems to have been made in a few States. Rural communities can use professional help to guide them in defining the needs and problems of children and youth. A simple survey in which local citizens gather and organize pertinent facts about the causes, nature, and extent of the local delinquency problem can be an effective generator of community action. Juvenile delinquency is essentially a local problem, and the community must carry the major responsibility for prevention and control.

The concept of urban and rural areas as separate and distinct entities vis-a-vis juvenile delinquency seems to be of diminishing usefulness. As metropolitan areas expand and multiply, adjacent rural areas gradually lose their distinct flavor and character by being drawn into the metropolitan sphere of influence. This process tends to make the rural-urban dichotomy increasingly difficult to discern and apply in developing programs and services related to juvenile delinquency.

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Our population is about to reach 200 million. If this number were spread over the entire country evenly, each 56 persons would have a square mile of living space. As long as jobs continue to cluster in urban areas, little spreading out of people to live in more open country is likely to occur. However, as crowding and congestion in metropolitan areas worsen, creative changes might begin to emerge which would hold hope for those who prefer rural living. One possibility is the development and operation of high speed commuter trains which could feed people into the big cities fast and economically from as far out as 100 miles. Would not many people prefer to live and raise their families in open country if they could be whisked to city jobs in 30 minutes?

Another possibility is the planned dispersal of factories and plants far out along arterial highways leading into the city like spokes of a wheel such as has been done in Sweden around Stockholm. With pockets of jobs distributed over the comparative open country within the spheres of influence of major cities more people who want to can enjoy the benefits of the rural living.

In looking ahead, Herman Kahn and Anthony Weiner in their book, "The Year 2000," estimate that 44 percent of projected population for that year of 318 million will live in three megalopoles with 25 percent in the stretch between Boston and Washington which they call "Boswash." If this projection proves reliable, then overall juvenile delinquency is likely to increase because we know that this is one of the penalties of progressive urbanization. Thus, even though resources of money and professional services to control delinquency are harder to come by in rural areas, it appears that the problem will be more manageable there in terms of its visibility and numbers.